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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/15): EXPECTATIONS AND FEARS
OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL "PEACE PROCESS" MEETING

Main Stories:

Al Quds and Al Ayyam run front page photos of Hamas leader Haniyah addressing crowds at a Hamas' rally in Gaza on December 14, celebrating the group's 21st anniversary. Citing news agencies, the papers quote Haniyyah rejecting the extension of Palestinian Authority President Abbas' term beyond January 9, 2009. Haniyah states that his top priority is to break the Gaza "siege" through implementing a "boat intifada" of international solidarity boats and other "creative means." He also states, according to Al Ayyam's front page, that President Bush has failed to topple Hamas rule in Gaza. A second Hamas leader Al Zahhar is quoted on Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page asserting that Palestinian internal division will continue for a long time, and that Hamas is the sole legitimate actor in the Palestinian Territories. Meanwhile, the papers front pages cite AFP in reporting that Abbas will soon call for presidential and legislative elections, according to Abbas' advisor Nabil Abu Rudaynah.

The Hamas truce with Israel will not be renewed, according to Hamas leader Khalid Misha'al who is quoted on Al Quds' front page. Citing news agencies, the reporting notes that Misha'al speaking from Damascus on December 14 stated that continued Israeli violations and the closure of Gaza crossing points preclude an extension. The paper cites AFP in also reporting that Israeli Premier Olmert stated that Israel will renew the truce if Hamas stops rocket attacks on Israel. In other Gaza news, Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page highlights that the Gaza Strip's only power plant ran out of fuel on December 14, plunging much of Gaza into darkness. Hamas members noted that they expect a 50% reduction in the supply of electricity to the Strip and possible power grid breakdowns, if Israel does not reopen crossings to allow for the entry of fuel. Citing news agencies, Al Hayat Al Jadida leads with statements by

Egypt's Foreign Minister Abu Al Ghayt telling journalists in Cairo on December 14 that Iran is seeking to expand its influence into the region by exploiting the Palestinian issue and manipulating a few Palestinians who have become, "like a toy in their [Iranians'] hands." Al Ayyam's front page also runs Abu Al Ghayt's statements.

All the papers run extensive front page photo and written coverage of the "attack" by a journalist on President Bush at a press conference in Baghdad during his farewell visit to Iraq on December 14. The papers note that President Bush listed U.S. achievements in Iraq despite the "many years of bloodshed" in Iraq. Al Ayyam's front page adds, citing DPA and Israeli daily Haaretz, that president-elect Obama is expected to appoint Dennis Ross as his special envoy to the Middle East.

Al Hayat Al Jadida's and Al Ayyam's front pages report that Secretary Rice called Palestinian Authority President Abbas on December 14 to discuss the U.N. Security Council's vote on a resolution concerning the Middle East peace process. Quoting Sa'eb Erekat, chief PLO negotiator, Al Hayat Al Jadida reveals that Abbas told Rice that the Palestinians have comments on the draft resolution. Al Ayyam's front page adds that Abbas reiterated his call for a halt to Israeli settlement activities. The papers also report that the Quartet will meet in New York on December 14 to discuss the Security Council's engagement in the Middle East peace process, and that Secretary Rice will participate in that meeting. An Al Quds' front page headline accuses Israel of attempting to cover up its human rights violations against Palestinians: Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida run above the fold coverage of Israel's detention of U.N Human Rights Council special investigator for Israeli actions in the Palestinian Territories Richard Falk, who

JERUSALEM 00002238 002.2 OF 003

arrived at Tel Aviv airport on December 14 with a delegation from the Council. The group was to report on the human rights situation in Israel, according to coverage.

Al Quds' and Al Ayyam's inside pages report that Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) "stormed" Jenin city and surrounding villages, especially Zboba village, on December 14. The IDF set up checkpoints and arrested a number of youth, taking them to a nearby IDF base. The papers add that the IDF also stormed the villages of Yamun, Arraba, Fahma, Kufr Ray and Al Rama. The papers continue that the IDF "alleged" that they were looking for wanted Palestinians.

Al Hayat Al Jadida's inside page reports that Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister advisor Hatim Abdul Qadir paid a "solidarity" visit to Bedouin areas near Ma'ale Adumim settlement in the E1 area near Jerusalem on December 14. Qadir is quoted saying that Israeli evacuation orders that were issued to the Bedouins over the Eid Al Adha holiday, will be appealed by an Israeli lawyer in the Israeli courts. The story continues weekend reporting on the alleged "Eastern Gate" plan for the E1 area. According to the dailies, the 5-year plan seeks to link the E1 block to the Jerusalem area Ma'ale Adumim settlement by adding 10,000 settlement units that will connect to the Jerusalem neighborhood of French Hill and include five hotels and a "huge" commercial mall.

In more settlement news, Al Quds' front page quotes Ahmad Ruwaydy, head of the Jerusalem Department at the Palestinian Authority (PA) PQident's office stating that the PA will raise "to an international level" its opposition to Israeli settlement practices in Jerusalem, especially the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. Ruwaydy also revealed that there is a Palestinian committee preparing documents to file in settlement related Israeli court cases, adding that he remains unconvinced of the Israeli judiciary's impartiality.

WEEKEND STORIES

Sunday, December 14

The dailies noted that Palestinian leadership initiated a series of contacts on December 13 with several Arab capitals to coordinate positions on the anticipated U.N. Security Council resolution regarding the peace process. In statements to Al Ayyam newspaper,

Dr. Sa'eb Erekat also revealed that, "intensive consultations and contacts are being conducted currently between U.N. Security Council members and the Arab Committee... the Palestinian and Israeli parties."

Al Quds' and Al Ayyam's front pages reported that Hamas confirmed on December 13 that it had not received any official invitation from Cairo to discuss the fate of the truce with Israel. Hamas stressed that the decision to extend the truce will be based on national consensus. Meanwhile, well-informed Israeli sources stated that a senior Israeli Defense Ministry official will travel to Cairo on December 14 to conduct talks with Egyptian intelligence service officials about the truce and the release of kidnapped Israeli soldier Shalit.

Saturday, December 13

"Chief Palestinian negotiator Quray reveals secrets about Israeli proposals," according to an Al Ayyam front page headline. In a comprehensive interview about political developments, Ahmad Quray explained that the Palestinian people and their national cause are facing a critical, difficult, and dangerous turning point that

JERUSALEM 00002238 003 OF 003

requires official positions be clear and unified. He added that internal division has continued for far too long and requires a more concerted effort to end before it becomes more entrenched. Quray also revealed that the gap between Israel and the Palestinians is still wide on the issues of Jerusalem and refugees, noting that the team had refused an Israeli proposal to annex 6.8% of Palestinian land where Israeli settlements are located and an Israeli "promise" to return 5,000 refugees to Israel.

Al Quds' and Al Ayyam's front pages reported that scores of "anti-wall protesters" were wounded in Ni'lin, Bil'in, and Al Ma'sara during the weekly protest. The papers noted that Palestinians were joined by foreign and Israeli peace activists to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al Quds' editorial is titled, "The required international role" (12/15): [Regarding the upcoming Security Council meeting] what we expect of today's Security Council, considering its responsibilities, is that it not be satisfied by issuing a non-binding statement, resolution or document to support the peace process... what the Council must do is adopt a clear mechanism that binds Israel to abide by international standards and end its illegitimate occupation of Arab and Palestinian Territories."

2) Samih Shabib opines in Al Ayyam under the title, "Waiting for the outcome of the Security Council meeting" (12/15): "Informed sources fear that the statement by the Security Council will set a new international precedent, that... bypasses legitimate international agreements... especially [U.N.] resolutions 242 and 338, and thus adopts a new basis for a continued Israeli-Palestinian peace process that has shown no tangible results so far... international efforts... would focus on sponsoring negotiations and averting their collapse... fearing the return of a spirit of resistance to the West Bank and Gaza - a natural, automatic reaction to negotiations that have lasted for so long without bearing any fruit."

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